

CAMP SUNDAY - 5.3.26 (Pastor Jon)

So today, because it's **Camp Sunday** or **Youth Sunday**, I wanted to let you in on what a typical Sunday Night looks like for EAG YTH.

We've been working verse-by-verse through the Gospel of Matthew since November of last year. How this works...

- We take a cohesive chunk of Scripture (usually just a handful of verses) and one of us will read it out loud...
- After reading, I'll give a little background commentary, so we can get the big-picture context of what we've just read...
- Then we'll have a few **Pro-Tips** (simple principles that we can write down and apply to our own lives from the passage)...
- Then we'll talk... We'll stop the lesson and take about 1-2 minutes of group discussion to be candid, be vulnerable, and have an honest conversation about what God is saying to us through His Word.

So this is what we get to do for every youth lesson—and this morning, **you guys get to participate along with us!** Even the Small Group Discussion!

Whenever there's a small group question, we're going to set the question and a timer on the screen, and all of you at your tables are going to discuss the question.

- If you're **nervous** about sharing, or if you're **not quite sure** what you're getting into with discussion... I'll tell you what I tell the

students: Lean in to the awkward. Get used to thinking, get used to sharing!

- This is an opportunity to stretch our thinking muscles and our bible muscles and our spiritual muscles this morning. Sound good?

LET'S PRAY!!!!

TEXT: MATTHEW 4:12-17

Today we're picking up in **Matthew 4**. Our last regular youth lesson, we covered the *first half* of Matthew 4. We learned about Jesus being tempted, and how you and I can strike back at temptation with God's Word. Now we're in the *second half* of **Matthew 4**, where Jesus begins His public earthly ministry.

Let's pick up in v. 12...

¹²When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, He left Judea and returned to Galilee. ¹³He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵"In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali, beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River, in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,

¹⁶the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.

And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow,

a light has shined.”

¹⁷ From then on, Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”

So a couple of pieces here...first of all, you’ll see two verses where Matthew cites an ancient prophecy about Jesus from the book of Isaiah.

PROPHECY

If you’re not familiar with how prophecy works, the first half of your Bible (what we call the **Old Testament**) contains a whole bunch of prophecies / predictions concerning the Jewish Messiah who would restore Israel’s relationship with God. Matthew originally wrote this Gospel for a Jewish audience...and one of Matthew’s **big goals** in writing this Gospel was to demonstrate to his Jewish readers that Jesus is indeed the Messiah that the Jews have been waiting for; that’s why Matthew quotes so much OT prophecy, like what we see here.

So that’s one piece of this section, but then there’s **another piece** that I want to hang out on for a bit.

JOHN THE BAPTIST’S ARREST

Go back and look at **verse 12** where it says that John the Baptist was arrested.

For the students... Do you remember way back in **Matthew 2** where we learned about **King Herod** who wanted Jesus killed?

That Herod is long dead and gone; now his **son, Herod Antipas** (we'll call him "Herod jr.") is in power. We won't go too deep into John's arrest today (we'll learn more about that in **Matthew 11**), but for now, just know that John the Baptist got in trouble with **Herod jr.** for speaking God's truth publicly and not telling **Herod jr.** what he wanted to hear.

Right after John is arrested, Jesus moves in to pick up where John left off.

And I really like what the Enduring Word commentary has to say about this:

"Galilee was the [territory] of Herod Antipas, who had imprisoned John. Into that region, [Jesus] went to continue the ministry of the man thus silenced... Evil may silence a voice, but it cannot prevent the [preaching] of [God's] Word. If John is imprisoned, then Jesus takes up the message."¹

Here's our first Pro-Tip:

PRO-TIP: When you serve God, you're serving an unstoppable King with unstoppable power.

We live in a day and age with a lot of fear. Sometimes, it's way too easy to "doomscroll", to hear all the bad news going on around us, and we think, "Ohhhhhh, it's so haaaaaaaard! Our parents never had to deal with what

¹ <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/matthew-4/>

we're dealing with; and there's **this** war, and **those** politics, and **this** issue, **that** issue! What in the world are we supposed to do?!"

And there's a tension there, where on one hand, we **do** live in a progressively evil world. Jesus tells us in **Matthew 24** that things on earth will get worse before they get better.

But on the **other** hand...imagine if Jesus had been **scared** of Herod jr.

Imagine if Jesus had just quit, and said, "Man, Herod's too evil. The world is too messed up. Life is too hard. I'm just going to play it safe, hide at home, and post all over social media how terrible everything is and how I wish we could have the good old days."

But Jesus did not play it safe and go into hiding.

Every single day of His earthly life:

- Jesus **trusted** God
- He **obeyed** God
- He **honored** God with every step of the way

And **even when Jesus was dying on the cross...**

He knew **that cross had no power over the plan** of His heavenly Father.

When you serve God, you're serving an unstoppable King with unstoppable power.

- Yes, it's ***bad out there***...
- Yes, ***evil things happen to godly people***.
- Yes, you and I may one day ***end up in trouble*** for following Jesus.

But even though Satan can try to stop ***us*** physically, he can ***never*** stop the ***plan***, the ***power***, and the ***authority*** of the God that we serve.

LET'S TALK: When we view God as unstoppable, even when bad things happen, how can that view of God change our relationship with Him? *countdown*

TRANSITION BACK TO TEXT

Let's go back to the text.

Here, Jesus is starting out His public earthly ministry. Notice that Jesus doesn't go out on His own; He starts choosing disciples to follow Him.

Matthew 4:18-22:

¹⁸ One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living.

¹⁹ Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow Me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" ²⁰ And they left their nets at once and followed Him.

²¹ A little farther up the shore He saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets.

And He called them to come, too. ²² They immediately followed Him, leaving the boat and their father behind.

Isn't it interesting how all of these guys followed Jesus *right away* without asking questions?

Usually if someone asks you to follow them, the first response is to ask questions....

- “**Why** do you want me to follow you?”
- “**How long** do you want me to follow you?”
- “**Did you ask my parents** or **my family** for permission to invite me to follow you?”

So at first it seems really odd that the disciples would follow Jesus without asking any of these questions.

But this is where the issue of **context** is important!

Last year, our youth group went through a series called “**How Do I**”, where we learned on a deeper level how to follow Jesus and how to read the Bible. And we learned how important it is to not just read the Bible at a surface level, but also to study the context and the culture of the **original audience** that the Bible was written to.

This passage from Matthew is a great example of where Jesus' Jewish context back then was waaaaay different than our American context that you and I know today.

CONTEXT EXPLAINED: Rabbinic Education

In the time of Jesus, the Jewish culture had religious teachers called "Rabbis". These Rabbis were kind of like "Jewish pastors"...

- They would **teach people about God**
- They would **help people understand Scripture**
- They were regarded as **very wise** and **honorable**

Rabbis had their own group of students, usually younger people, who...

- would **follow** the Rabbi...
- **spend time** with the Rabbi...
- be **personally mentored** by the Rabbi and learn from Him...

...and these students would be known as "**disciples**".

Traditionally in Jewish culture, students would seek out the rabbis; but here's **a reverse Uno! Instead of students seeking out Jesus, Jesus is seeking out students!**

To help us understand this better...I came across a video of an actual modern-day Rabbi, Rabbi Jason, who is a Messianic Jew (that's a Jew who believes that Jesus or "Yeshua" is the promised Jewish Messiah). I've

edited the video down to about 3.5 minutes. Here, Rabbi Jason is going to explain for us the relationship between a rabbi and disciple; as he talks, and as we remember what we just read in **Matthew 4**, let's listen and learn how the Jewish context of discipleship can teach us some powerful lessons about our own relationship with Jesus and what it means to be His disciple.

play video

Rabbi Jason said something that really caught my attention; discipleship is not just reading a book...or having quiet time...or trying to go through the motions of a pre-constructed program. ***Discipleship*** is about ***learning***, ***imitating***, and ***actively investing in face-to-face relationship*** with the Rabbi.

So with these first four disciples...Andrew, Peter, James, and John...Jesus is inviting them not just to a book or a program...He's inviting them to ***meaningful relationship*** with Him. It's not just, "Come follow Me *physically*". It's, "Come follow Me ***relationally***."

- "Come ***learn*** from Me..."
- "Come ***spend time*** with Me..."
- "Come ***obey*** Me..."
- "Come be My ***apprentice*** so that your relationship with God can look like Mine."

Here's our second pro-tip:

PRO-TIP: Being a disciple and following Jesus is not just about doing things for God; it's about being in relationship with God.

Following Jesus is not just about ***what you do***; it's about ***who you are***. Just “doing” something with someone is not always the same as “being in relationship” with someone, right?

ILLUSTRATION: Tar River Children's Chorus

I think for example about the Tar River Children's Chorus. All 3 of our camp students are in that choir...you had a big concert last night...and you all ***do*** things together in that choir...

- You ***learn*** together
- You ***sing*** together
- You ***attend*** rehearsals and performances together

...but if you had to choose between a ***7-hour choir rehearsal*** and 7 hours of visiting, talking, and staying up late watching movies...which one would you choose?... Right! Relationship is not just about ***doing*** things together, but ***being*** together!

ILLUSTRATION: Drive Thru

Or another example I think of is Chick-fil-A.

Whenever I pick up Chick-fil-A in the Drive-Thru, there are things that I kind of “do together” with the people taking my order.

- I'll talk with them for 2-5 seconds
- I'll give them my card and get it back
- I'll receive my food, thank them, and they'll say, "My pleasure!"

So there's a **tiny degree** of interaction there.

But ***doing things*** with the people at Chick-fil-A is not the same as ***having relationship*** with the people at Chick-fil-A.

- ***Talking with a worker at the drive-thru window*** is not the same as sitting down and ***opening up my heart to someone***.
- ***Picking up my food*** from someone and ***driving away in my car*** is not the same as ***slowing down, taking time, and sharing a meal*** together. ***pause***

Following Jesus is not just about **doing things** for God, but **being in relationship** with God.

LET'S TALK: If discipleship is about ***being***, and not just ***doing***...

What do *you* think are some of the differences between "doing things" for God and "being in relationship" with God? ***countdown***

TRANSITION to TEXT

We're just about done with Matthew 4, so let's finish off the last chunk of the chapter together:

Matthew 4:23-25

²³ Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And He healed every kind of disease and illness. ²⁴ News about Him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to Him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—He healed them all. ²⁵ Large crowds followed Him wherever He went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns, Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.

Let's connect these verses back to the discipleship piece that we talked about earlier.

When the disciples chose to follow Jesus, they gave up a lot.

- They left their **families**...
- They left their **income**...
- They left behind **everything** that was **special**, **familiar**, and **safe**...

...but **because the disciples chose to follow Jesus**, they got to see the hand of God at work in some **incredible** ways.

- Sickness **healed**
- Demons **cast out**
- Paralytics **walking again**

- People's *very lives changed before their eyes*

The disciples got to see all these amazing things—but they *never* would've had that experience if they had played it safe and just stayed home. *They had to go all-in on following Jesus and they had to surrender to Him first.*

Here's our last pro-tip...

PRO-TIP: When we go “all-in” on following Jesus, fresh surrender to God positions us for a fresh move of God.

Imagine if these first disciples saw the move of God that we just read about in the last verses of **Matthew 4**...and suppose they thought, “Well, *that* was cool! But I've had enough following Jesus for today. Let's go back home.”

Something struck me as I was putting this study together: *Have you ever realized that nobody forced the disciples to stay with Jesus?*

- Never once does the Bible ever tell us about Jesus *forcing*, *coercing*, or *legally-binding* anybody into following Him.
- In fact, **John 6:66** tells of a time when Jesus gave a *heavy teaching* after an *amazing miracle*.
- **Long story short:** Jesus fed over 5,000 people at one time with two fish and five loaves of bread. The next day, that same crowd came back to Jesus and said, “Hey, yesterday was great! Can You do that again?” Jesus told them, “You can't just follow Me for *free food* or for

cheap miracles. If you want to follow Me, that's going to require deep sacrifice. You need to believe in Me, trust Me, and obey the Word of God that I speak to you.” And people didn't want to hear that.

- At this time in His ministry, Jesus had His **Core 12** disciples, but there were **numerous lesser-known disciples** who were in His entourage too.
- **And when Jesus spoke the hard truth about believing in Him, Verse 66** says that “At this point, many of His disciples turned away and no longer followed Him.”
- **Everybody wanted the miracle of the past...but nobody wanted to surrender in the present.**
- Nobody wanted that sacrificial discipling relationship of not just doing, but “being”, that comes with following Jesus.

No one forced the 12 to stay with Jesus.

But it's obvious from Scripture that these 12 disciples **kept on choosing** to follow Jesus, to seek Him, and grow close to Him, day after day after day.

The everyday fresh surrender of Jesus' closest disciples put them in position to see God's hand at work on a level they'd never experience before.

Let's tie this into youth camp for a minute.

CAMP Segment

A few of you went to youth camp last year. That involved some sacrifice...

- There was **financial** sacrifice with the money you had to raise and the money that people gave on your behalf
- There was **relational** sacrifice, being away from home for 5 days
- There was **emotional** sacrifice...being honest, being vulnerable, and talking things through afterward (or crying things through)
- There was **spiritual** sacrifice...going to the **altar**, **surrendering** to God, allowing Him to do what He wanted to do in your hearts.

So there was a lot of sacrifice / surrender...but out of that sacrifice and out of that surrender, we saw God do some amazing things in all of us.

I remember telling the group on our last night of camp, "I've been following Jesus longer than you guys have been alive; and this is one of the most amazing encounters ***I've*** ever had with the presence of God."

All of that was amazing...all of that was special...but as good as that was, ***that was yesterday... and what does God want from us today?***

My prayer for camp this year is that we would go into that week with a heart of fresh surrender, saying, "God, thank You for what You did *last year...*but what do You want to do *this year?*"

ADULT TIE-IN

And that question of fresh surrender is not just for us who are going to camp; that's a question for every individual in this room.

Many of you have been following Jesus or grown up in church for a long time. ***But how fresh is your heart? How fresh is your own personal surrender towards God?***

- Are you content to ***live in the past*** and ***reminisce*** about what God did way back in the “good old days”?
- Are you like those ***fringe followers who deserted Jesus*** in John 6:66? “Well Jesus, ***I love what You did yesterday***, but ***I really don't care for what You're doing today***, so I'm out.”
- ***Are you running on the fumes of yesterday's miracle...or are you positioning yourself for today's surrender?***

My prayer for our youth ministry and for all of us here is that we would pursue that place of fresh surrender with God this year.

CONCLUSION

Usually, we close our youth lessons by going around the room and praying for each other's prayer requests. But today I want to close a little different...

Here we've got a crew of 5—3 students, and 2 leaders—who are going to youth camp.

And we didn't do this last year, so I want to do it this year...**let's surround these students in prayer.**

- **Parents**, come on up and be with your students...
- Others as you're able, let's come up and **surround the parents**.
- I've asked **Melody Hall** to pray and I've asked **Pastor Gerry** to pray.

Then we'll dismiss and get ready for our VBS meeting and bake sale.

But before we do any of that...let's take time to come before the throne of grace today...

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